

Kitchen rehab for resale

By Erin K. Witt

Today's historically low interest rates are not only inspiring many consumers to buy homes—for some current homeowners there has never been a better time to remodel. In fact, Americans spent \$214 billion on home renovations last year, according to Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

Whether it is for personal enjoyment or in preparation of a future home sale, remodeling key areas of the home is a good strategy.

REALTORS® report that the kitchen is one of the most important rooms to a potential buyer. And a kitchen update is also a good investment—according to *Remodeling Magazine's* annual cost versus value report, a major kitchen remodeling would return 80 percent of the investment in a resale.

Here are a few remodeling and redecorating tips to touch up a tired kitchen affordably and effectively:

Tip #1: Curb kitchen remodeling expenses. If possible, reuse existing appliances and build new cabinets around them. This could easily save \$1,500-\$5,000.

Tip #2: Maintain the present location of major fixtures, appliances and utilities relative to the plumbing, gas and electrical outlets. This could even apply to the location of the telephone. Moving plumbing, wiring, and jacks can be extremely expensive.

Tip #3: Faucets can be costly. The least expensive selection is chrome—even a high-end chrome faucet is considerably less than a mid-range brass or porcelain version. A standard two-handle faucet will also cost less than single-handle. In either case, always choose a faucet with replacement internal parts so you won't have to replace the entire faucet if it breaks.

Tip #4: Choose neutral colors for fixtures, appliances, and laminates. They are less expensive initially, and won't look dated when the color trends change. White and almond sinks are much cheaper than color varieties. And neutral laminate colors for countertops are less than custom colors or textures.

Tip #5: Good floor covering ties one room to another and provides visual consistency. In general, vinyl or laminate flooring is less expensive than wood, tile, or slate. Use the existing floor covering if it is still in good condition. If the kitchen has old vinyl flooring, there may be a hardwood floor underneath which could be sanded and refinished. Or if the home has vinyl floor covering, install synthetic floor leveler material over the existing vinyl floor and lay the new vinyl flooring on top, rather removing the old flooring before installation.

Tip #6: Consider your cabinet options carefully. Adding new cabinets often requires installing a new floor. Refacing existing cabinets not only eliminates the need for new flooring, countertops and appliances, it is a major saving in any kitchen remodel. If you can't reface, use standard cabinetry instead of custom cabinets. Also, choose cabinets that can be operated without the addition of hardware—such as those that are finger-pulled—and refrain from selecting cabinets with trim moldings.

Tip #7: If installing new wood trim in crown molding, trims, and door casings, order pre-finished trim instead of having the painting or staining done on site. This will reduce labor cost. Ordering finger-jointed vs. clear vertical grain also will save you money.

Tip #8: Consider stenciling on the backsplash instead of using tile. This creative touch can help personalize the kitchen to your unique tastes or hobbies.

Tip #9: Laminate countertops are the least expensive choice among solid surfacing options, especially when compared to tile and granite. Dressing it up with wood or tile trim will offer a more innovative look. Alternating countertop materials may be a good compromise, too. Reserve granite for an island and use a neutral, solid surface material for all the other countertops. Top a baking counter with a slab of marble. Or use ceramic tile or laminate in the wet areas, and top a peninsula with maple butcher block.

Tip #10: When possible, use natural lighting, which is more diffuse than artificial lighting. If artificial light is a necessity, consider L-shaped track lighting on the ceiling to boost overall light levels in the room and task lighting under the cabinets. Or, connect fluorescent light fixtures to the existing ceiling fixture box instead of installing new recessed lighting, which may require a new ceiling because of the recessed features.